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# Gloucester County's Most Famous Citizen

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General Franklin Davenport

1755-1832



BY FRANK H. STEWART  
PRESIDENT OF THE GLOUCESTER COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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Stewart, Frank H.

GLOUCESTER COUNTY DEMOCRAT PRINT  
WOODBURY, N. J.

1921

E207  
112358

Gift  
Author  
MAY 1921

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Address delivered at the North Woodbury Presbyterian Grave Yard, by Frank H. Stewart, President of the Gloucester County Historical Society, the day of its annual meeting, January 11, 1921, when a memorial stone was dedicated to the memory of General Franklin Davenport; also, at the annual meeting of the

Old Gloucester County Chapter Sons of the Revolution, held Tuesday evening, February 8, 1921, at the home of its President, Cooper and Rugby Streets, Woodbury, N. J.

Reprinted, with additions, from Gloucester County Democrat, March 17, 1921.

We are gathered here today to pay tribute to Gloucester County's most famous citizen, an officer of the Revolution, and at the time of his decease a Major General of Militia, the ranking officer of the State of New Jersey, having been in the military service of New Jersey for over 56 years—1775-1832.

He was born in Philadelphia in September, 1755. The parents of General Davenport were Josiah Franklin Davenport and Ann Annis, married in Christ Church, Philadelphia, December 13, 1751. She was the daughter of William and Patience Story Annis, the latter a daughter of Enoch Story, the elder a well-known citizen of Philadelphia, around the year 1700.

William Annis was a mariner and had two other daughters. Mary, who married Enoch Story, probably a relative, April 13 1758, and Sarah, who married Joseph Kirill, February 21, 1753. Sarah Kirill, the aunt of General Davenport, died a widow in Woodbury July 8, 1809, according to the diary of Samuel Mickle. She left her estate to Deborah Davenport, the sister of the General. Deborah died May 4 1824 aged 63. Ann Davenport died September 25, 1801. According to Mickle both the mother and sister of the General were buried in the Presbyterian grave yard and the obituary notice of his death says he was buried beside his relatives.

In 1769 Josiah F. Davenport was part owner of a new four-horse stage route between Philadelphia and New York. At that time he kept a tavern on Third street near Chestnut street, Philadelphia, known as the "Sign of the Bunch of Grapes." He removed to Burlington, N. J., where on February 22, 1773, he was appointed a Justice of the Peace for Burlington County by Governor Franklin. He was the Sheriff of the

County in 1776 and probably died there within a year, because the last record available of him is of August, 1776, when he was paid for board of Governor Wm. Franklin, who had been arrested by instruction of the Continental Congress. In 1777 there was another Sheriff of Burlington County.

On July 1, 1778, Ann, his wife or widow, advertised a boarding school for young ladies under twelve years of age in "her large and airy house in Burlington."

The father of Benjamin Franklin was named Josiah, so it is likely that the Davenports were related to the Franklins. It is quite possible that he was a descendant of Francis Davenport, one of the first prominent settlers of Burlington County. In 1775 he was studying law in Burlington in the office of John Lawrence, Esq., a relative of Captain James Lawrence. He was clerk of the Burlington County Court in February, 1778.

After the battle of Lexington, he immediately volunteered as a private in Captain James Sterling's Company and served until Dec. 22, 1776, when he was promoted to Brigade Major and served under Colonels Griffin, Newcomb and Penrose until January 26, 1777. From the spring of 1777 to 1782 he was enrolled under Captain Hugg. He was a participant in the battles of Trenton and Princeton, also in the actions at Coopers' Creek and Saunders Hill on Mantua Creek where he commanded a piece of artillery as Captain-Lieutenant under Captain Samuel Hugg.

While I have no evidence to substantiate it, it is highly probable that he was in the Artillery Company located on the farm of Tench Francis on the Delaware River front near Woodbury and opposite Hog Island when the British fleet destroyed Fort Mifflin. An English war map of Nov. 26, 1777, shows



that among the ships engaged were the Isis, Somerset, Roebuck, Liverpool and Pearl, and that they concentrated their fire on the American Artillery on the Jersey shore which consisted of two eighteen pounders and two nine pounders. The American account contained in a letter of William Bradford to Thomas Wharton said there were two pieces there on Nov. 16, 1777.

On February 25, 1778, he was appointed Brigade Quartermaster under Col. Ellis at Haddonfield, and on June 4, 1778, Assistant Quartermaster for Gloucester County until the following winter, after which time the enemy never appeared in this part of New Jersey. From then on he was always in the New Jersey Militia serving in the capacity of Lieut. Colonel of the Second Regiment Gloucester Co. Militia from June 5th, 1793, to Nov. 4, 1796, when he was appointed Brigadier General of the Gloucester Brigade and was at the time of his death, July 27, 1832, Major General of the First Division of the New Jersey Militia.

Although enfeebled by old age and gout and harassed by the sheriff and various creditors who stripped him of all of his real estate and personal property, including his household furniture and law library, the courageous old soldier never claimed or applied for a pension until seventeen days before his death, and I strongly suspect that even then it was only done to assist his wife, who was of a distinguished family and who lived at least until 1852.

General Davenport, May 18, 1804, married Sarah Barton Zantzinger, born at Lancaster, Pa., March 9, 1778, the daughter of Paul and Esther Barton Zantzinger. Esther Barton was the daughter of Rev. Thomas and Esther Rittenhouse Barton, married at Swedes Church, Philadelphia, Dec. 8, 1753. The latter, the grandmother of Mrs. Davenport, was the sister of David Rittenhouse, the famous patriot, scientist and first director of the U. S. Mint where his office was on the spot where I now have mine.

It will be noticed that General Davenport was in his 49th year at the time of his marriage which was, so far as I know, his first and only one. Diligent search has failed to find a prior one. His portrait, a copy of which I now show you, made by the celebrated artist, St. Memin, in 1798, was therefore made when he was a bachelor.

St. Memin also made a portrait of Rebecca Davenport, the sister of the General, at the same time. She was probably the keeper of a refined board-

ing house in Woodbury and was very active in the social, religious and educational affairs of our town. She and her mother both died before the General and he was buried beside them in this abandoned grave yard, the ownership of which is disputed because of a lien for the sidewalk, probably through ignorance, because the title of the neglected place lies in the trustees of the Presbyterian Church of this town. The old trustees died without reconveying the ground to a new and younger group of trustees as was the custom of religious bodies one or two centuries ago. Capt. Archibald Moffett was one of the trustees of record and he died in 1816. He was the ancestor of Louis B. Moffett.

General Davenport was clerk of Gloucester County Court in 1775, probably a substitute clerk, and Prosecutor of the Pleas for Gloucester County during the Revolution, also a practicing lawyer.

In 1781 he lived in the town of Gloucester and had a horse and riding chair. His name appears on the 1783 Deptford Township assessment without a list of any kind of property.

In 1784 he was assessed as a single man with two horses and a riding chair, also a house and lot.

On Nov. 6, 1794, he was defeated in the N. J. Legislature for Secretary of State by Samuel W. Stockton.

On November 17, 1801, he was appointed Master in Chancery and served until the office was vacated March 1, 1803. He was chairman of the mass meetings held in Woodbury in Nov. 1819, to fight the contemplated removal of the county seat and public buildings from Woodbury to Camden when the Delaware river bridge seemed a certainty.

In Oct. 1827, General Davenport was a defeated candidate for the Clerkship of the House of Assembly of N. J. On the first ballot he received ten of the thirty-nine votes cast for four candidates. After several ballots William L. Prall was elected.

The financial difficulties of General Davenport seem to have begun in Dec. 1819, because between that date and Feb. 24, 1822, he gave six or more mortgages.

Sheriff Enoch Doughty, who was also a General of Militia, made record of the sale of General Davenport's household effects April 30, 1828, in place of Col. John Baxter, late Sheriff, who had died without issuing execution against his friend Davenport. The list included a library of law and other books, some of which are now in possession of the



Gloucester Co. Historical Society; also 6 beds and bedding, 30 chairs, 10 tables, lots of carpeting, 3 bureaus, 10 looking glasses, andirons, shovels and tongs, crockery ware, cups and saucers, side, board, decanters, glassware, etc. All other household and kitchen furniture, together with his garden tools.

On April 24, 1829, his wife, Sarah Barton Davenport, gave a quit claim to James G. Clark for a dower right, also another one as his widow on April 7, 1834, to the Camden State Bank. It is quite likely that she left the vicinity of Woodbury, because I find no trace of her residence here after that date. My presumption is that she returned to her relatives in Lancaster, Pa., and tried to forget the financial difficulties that worried her and her distinguished husband.

Sheriff Jesse Smith recorded Feb. 10, 1832, to Dr. John G. Clarke, of Philadelphia, the deeds for two brick dwelling houses bought by General Davenport of John and Ruth Sparks: one of them was occupied by the General, the other by his sister Deborah.

At this time the gallant soldier of the Revolution, crippled by the infirmities of life, with no roof over his head, and divested of even his furniture and books, must have been in a sorry plight, and it is no wonder that his death soon followed and that the undertaker's expense was only three dollars. It shows the truth of the old saying that "A man once had three dollars and three friends. He loaned the three dollars to the three friends and lo! he had no dollars and no friends."

The following obituary notice was printed in the *True American* for August 4, 1832, also in the *United States Gazette of Philadelphia* on July 31, 1832, under the heading, "Another Revolutionary Soldier Gone":

"At Woodbury, New Jersey, on the morning of the 27th ult., General Franklin Davenport, in the 77th year of his age. His remains were deposited in the burial ground near Woodbury on Saturday afternoon last by the side of his relatives. As it is contemplated by his friends to give a short history of his valuable life, it is considered unnecessary to say more upon this melancholy subject at this time than is contained in this notice." A search has failed to disclose anything that has ever been printed beyond this adequately describing the patriotism and civic virtues of our most famous soldier-statesman. For the reflection of those who call historians and genealogists fossils and bugs, I will say that if it were not for

the Gloucester County Historical Society that even at this late date eighty-eight years after his decease the forgetful and forgotten friends of General Davenport would have succeeded in burying the story of his life with the same lack of care used in his burial. They probably felt that even his tombstone would have been destroyed and his burial place disowned by its custodians as has actually happened with other tombstones in the neglected and disowned graveyard of the Presbyterian Church of Woodbury, given by a man named Tatum over two centuries ago. Fortunately it has not yet been condemned for a public park like the old Strangers burial ground where the continental soldiers killed at the battle of Red Bank were buried and then bartered away and used for private purposes.

When Cape May was a famous resort of America and the vacation place of statesmen, General Franklin Davenport was a frequent and popular visitor. He generally stayed at a hotel kept by a man named Edmunds and he named one of his sons after Franklin Davenport. The present Franklin Davenport Edmunds of Philadelphia perpetuates the name of his uncle. There was also an Admiral in the U. S. Navy who named his son Franklin Davenport Zantzinger. The present surrogate of Gloucester Co. is named Franklin Davenport Pedrick and has an opportunity to examine the records made by General Davenport when he was the surrogate. There was also a Franklin Davenport Howell, probably a relative of Governor Howell, who was a friend of General Davenport.

In Book A of our Orphans Court Records, it is recorded that Franklin Davenport on February 15, 1785, took the oath of office as surrogate of Gloucester County and as Clerk of the Court before Judge John Wilkins. He thus became the first surrogate of our county after the Revolution. A month later, March 15th, John Cooper, Joseph Hugg and John Wilkins were affirmed as Judges of the Court. Judge Cooper was a member of Continental Congress. He died on April 1st after five years' service as a Judge and was buried in the Friends' grave yard of Woodbury.

At the time of his death the General was the oldest practicing member of the N. J. Bar. He was licensed as an attorney at law in Nov. 1776. He was made a sergeant at law in April 1797. Dr. MacGeorge says he was also a Judge. He was appointed Master and Examiner in Chancery Court May 27, 1826, to succeed E. D. Woodruff.

He was a founder and on the first board of Trustees of Woodbury Academy in 1791. He was president of the Board in 1820.

He was a founder and first Vice-President of the Gloucester Co. Bible Society founded April 29, 1816.

He was one of the founders of the Woodbury Fire Co., founded March 16, 1799.

He was a founder, first President and attorney of the Gloucester Co. Abolition Society founded April 27, 1793. It ceased to exist when laws preventing slavery were passed by New Jersey.

He was a founder of the Union Library Co. Founded April 24, 1794, incorporated April 21, 1814, as the Woodbury Library Co. He was its president in 1803 and served for several years. The library still exists here in our city library, and is one of the oldest ones in the United States.

General Davenport's career as a Freemason was not the least of his many activities. He was at the 1791 session of the New Jersey Grand Lodge as a visiting brother. At the July 3rd, 1792, meeting he was recorded present as a Past Master. He was made a Mason in Trenton Lodge No. 5, Nov. 15, 1790. He demitted July 2, 1792, and with twelve others made application to the Grand Lodge the following day for a warrant for a new lodge at Woodbury. He was first Worshipful Master of Woodbury Lodge No. 11 and served for several years. He served continuously 1792 to 1818 inclusive, and when the Lodge was destroyed by fire in 1817, together with its jewels, records and furniture, he was its official head and was instrumental in securing a new warrant and an appropriation of one hundred dollars from the Grand Lodge to rebuild the Lodge room.

He was active as an officer of the Grand Lodge for over twenty years. At the December 31st, 1792, meeting, he served as Junior Grand Warden pro tem. July 1, 1795, he acted as Junior Deacon of the Grand Lodge. In 1798 he was Junior Warden pro tem. From 1805 to 1815 he served as Junior Grand Warden and in 1810 and 1811 acted as Senior Grand Warden pro tem. During 1815-16-17 he was Senior Grand Warden and in 1817 Deputy Grand Master pro tem.

On June 6th, 1809, he installed John Dunham as Master of Friendship Lodge No. 22, at Port Elizabeth, and in 1811, installed the officers and consecrated the new hall of the new Lodge known as Sharptown Lodge No. 32. Among my first recollections is the demolition of

this Salem County landmark on the site now occupied by the general store of William Richman.

The application for the Charter of Woodbury Lodge No. 11 was signed by General Davenport, Joseph Ellis, Thomas Hodgson, Benjamin H. Tallman, John Blackwood, Benjamin Whitall, Joshua Howell, Jr., Champion Wood, Elijah Cozens, Amos Pearce, William Rice, Samuel Clement and Joseph P. Hillman.

Its first officers were, in 1792: Franklin Davenport, Master; John Blackwood, Senior Warden; Champion Wood, Junior Warden. In 1794, he was Master and James Hopkins was Junior Warden. In 1797, General Davenport was still the Master; Thomas Wilkins, Junior Warden; Amos Pearce, Treasurer.

Rev. Andrew Hunter and Joseph Ellis were Masters of two of the Army Lodges of 1782, the former of Lodge No. 36 of the New Jersey Line and the latter of No. 32 of Burlington. Rev. Andrew Hunter was Woodbury's most famous clergyman and his first wife is buried in the disowned graveyard in North Woodbury. His second wife was a daughter of Richard Stockton, signer of the Declaration of Independence. Col. Joseph Ellis, it will be noticed, was one of the Charter members of No. 11 of Woodbury.

General Joseph Bloomfield, who gave the Woodbury Academy school lot to us for educational purposes, was Past Master of Bristol, Pa. Lodge, in December, 1786. He was later a Governor of New Jersey and a life long friend of General Davenport, and probably lived in Woodbury at one time.

Col. Elijah Clark of Woodbury, also buried at North Woodbury, was Deputy Grand Secretary of the New Jersey Grand Lodge in 1796. His son, Major Lardner Clark, removed to Tennessee and became the first merchant of Nashville. He was also a Philadelphia merchant and lived near Haddonfield.

Elisha Clark, brother of Major Lardner Clark, was Clerk of the Gloucester County Courts and a well-known Woodburian.

Among the members of Woodbury Lodge No. 11, in addition to those already mentioned as members, were: Lucius H. Stockton, James B. Caldwell, Isaac Kay, Samuel Chatham. After 1800, the following appear: Thomas West, Joshua Ladd Howell, James M. Whitall, Dayton Lammis, Daniel Cooper, John Zane, John Cade, John Dunham, John E. Jeffers, Master in 1823, Jeremiah J. Foster, William Newburn, Isaac Hincman and Jesse Price.

It is highly probable that with the decease of General Davenport, the guiding star of Woodbury Lodge No. 11, that it ceased work. Nothing appears of record after his decease and the Lodge, together with a great many others, was stricken off the list of Member Lodges of the New Jersey Grand Lodge in 1841. Brearley of Bridgeton is today the only existing Lodge in South Jersey that was contemporaneous with No. 11.

The grand officers who occasionally visited Woodbury No. 11 always expressed satisfaction regarding its officers and its orderly conduct.

He was the only Gloucester Countian that ever sat in the United States Senate, Dec. 5, 1798, to Feb. 27, 1799. On March 4, 1799, he took his seat in the U. S. Congress and served one term of two years, having been elected in Nov. 1798. His service in the Senate was by appointment of Governor Richard Howell to fill a vacancy.

While Surrogate, he wrote on page 146 of his office record the following:

The Surrogate of the County of Gloucester, Franklin Davenport, having marched from Trenton, N. J., through Pennsylvania to Pittsburg as Colonel Commandant of a detachment of New Jersey Militia consisting of seven hundred and twenty-four rank and file with a double proportion of Field and Staff officers by order of the President of the United States, George Washington, to assist in quelling an insurrection raised by the patriots of the day.

Fr. Davenport.

Note—I left Woodbury the 18th of Sept., 1794, and returned home the last of December following.

Fr. Davenport.

Benjamin Whittall, Jr., was a surgeon on this expedition.

In some of his writings a similarity exists between his penmanship and that of George Washington, the oval character of his letters being very unusual.

The Gloucester Co. Historical Society has a cannon ball about the size of an orange which was one of two found by Clayton S. Thompson on his farm, which was undoubtedly fired down the old Kings highway that crossed the Bodo Otto farm just below the present sand stone dwelling house.

We know that Franklin Davenport was there and it is easy to imagine had something to do with the actual discharge of the field piece that sent it across from the Otto house to the Thompson farm. Our secretary, Mr. Carter, who was raised in the Otto place, remembers plowing across the abandoned Kings Highway that crossed

his father's field to avoid the deep waters of Saunders run.

Because of the fact that the two Fire Companies of Woodbury have sent delegations to pay their share of respect to the memory of General Davenport, it is fitting to add a few special remarks about the Woodbury Fire Company.

#### THE WOODBURY FIRE COMPANY

Until Samuel Mickle, diarist and merchant of Woodbury, proposed on April 29, 1793, that the inhabitants of Woodbury furnish themselves with fire buckets, nothing had been done for fire protection. This was apparently done because on May 5, 1799, Friends Preparative Meeting of Woodbury subscribed thirty pounds for the encouragement of a lately proposed fire company. The two schools in Woodbury subscribed forty dollars each besides fire buckets. It would, therefore, seem that before this time in accordance with the suggestion that Friend Mickle had made six years before that a subscription be collected for the purchase of fire buckets had been adopted and that the buckets had been placed with the Academy and the Deptford Free Schools.

On Dec. 12, 1799, Franklin Davenport appeared before the Board of Freeholders on behalf of the Woodbury Fire Company and requested assistance for the purchase of the fire engine and other apparatus, and succeeded in securing an appropriation of \$200.00 to be paid by the County Collector or Treasurer on or before the first of the ensuing year.

The fire engine, which cost 135 pounds or \$432.00, was delivered July 8, 1799. A subscription list dated April 27, 1799, includes among others the name of Franklin Davenport, who subscribed eight dollars. This list hangs in the house of Friendship Fire Co. and the engine, strange to say, has escaped destruction and is now a venerable relic of Woodbury, and is also in possession of the Friendship Co. as a direct successor of the original company.

I have been informed that about half a dozen wells were dug on the most desirable locations for fighting fires in Woodbury. I have often tried to locate them but without success; although Mr. Benjamin W. Cloud said he would write me giving the locations I have never gotten the information.

I desire to express my appreciation for assistance from Frank Willing Leach, Dr. Carlos E. Godfrey, Dr. Wallace MacGeorge, and Isaac Cherry, Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of F. & A. M. of New Jersey.













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